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SUBJECT: IRISH FOREIGN MINISTER ADDRESSES IRISH RELATIONS WITH THE EU

REF: 08 DUBLIN 696 AND PREVIOUS

Summary

¶11. (SBU) Irish Foreign Minister Micheal Martin presented the Government of Ireland's annual State of the Union address to the Institute of International and European Affairs on January 15, focusing on Ireland's relationship with the European Union rather than the state of the EU itself. Martin emphasized the importance of the EU to Ireland. Saying that the Irish had not rejected Europe in defeating the Lisbon Treaty referendum in June 2008, and that the EU had offered legal guarantees to safeguard Irish concerns about the Treaty, Martin declared that it was "logical" to proceed with a second referendum. Martin went on to sharply criticize the leaders of groups who campaigned against the Treaty in June 2008, labeling them as Eurosceptics who want to deny Ireland the benefits of EU membership. Martin has essentially drawn battlelines for the second Lisbon Treaty referendum, expected towards the end of 2009. If he leads a successful campaign for the Treaty in coming months, Martin could become the leading contender to succeed Brian Cowen as the next Prime Minister of Ireland. End Summary.

The Irish Have Not Rejected Europe

¶12. (U) Martin began his address by acknowledging that the people of Ireland had voted against the Lisbon Treaty by a margin of 53.4% to 46.6% in a referendum in June 2008. He went on to state that the government's position from the time of the vote was "one of full acceptance of the decision of the people." However, he noted, "the factors underpinning [the rejection] were both complex and worthy of detailed examination and reflection," so as to clearly understand the concerns that had been expressed by the Irish people to the government and the EU. Therefore, he said, the government was compelled to determine if the people's concerns "could be responded to in a manner acceptable to Ireland and to all 26 other Member States."

The EU is Critical to Ireland

¶13. (U) Martin went on to declare that "all available evidence confirms that there is a strong desire for Ireland to remain a central player in the European Union, and continue a tradition of punching above its weight. It is my firm assessment that this cannot be fully ensured if we are unable to come to terms with our European partners on the future functioning of the Union. This means that we must strive to resolve our difficulties concerning the Lisbon Treaty and facilitate its ratification."

¶14. (U) He pointed to recent evidence of the EU's capacity to make a difference for Ireland and the world, highlighting the key role of the EU in international efforts to deal with the global financial crisis, in leading the international community in climate change initiatives, and in dealing with the current gas supply crisis and

other energy security issues in a unified manner. He stated, "The Lisbon Treaty reflects our values and supports our interests. A more efficient Union, a more democratic Union, a Union that supports workers' rights and the pro-competitiveness agenda, effective and well-defined security cooperation, and a strengthened role for national parliaments. The Lisbon Treaty remains a very necessary adjustment of the Union's rules so as to allow a larger Union to act in an effective and accountable manner."

¶15. (U) Saying that the all-party parliamentary sub-committee on Ireland's future in the EU had conducted research, "heard and debated submissions from the full range of stakeholders, and produced a very impressive report," Martin declared that the government had fully determined the concerns of the people in rejecting the Lisbon Treaty. These concerns, he said, had been communicated to the rest of the EU - who had worked with the Irish government in a "spirit of cooperation and openness that is characteristic of the Union" and had agreed to provide "firm and unambiguous legal guarantees" to safeguard Irish autonomies.

A Second Treaty Referendum is "Logical"

¶16. (U) Martin highlighted the EU's agreement to allow Ireland (and every other EU member state) to retain an EU Commissioner, stating that this represented a significant change to the Lisbon Treaty package voted on in June and a major concession to the concerns of the Irish people by the rest of the EU. He also emphasized the EU's willingness to safeguard Ireland's policy of military neutrality, Ireland's ability to shape its own tax policy, and the provisions of the Irish Constitution on the right to life, education, and the

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family (including anti-abortion statutes). He noted that the Irish government had secured a re-commitment by the EU to the principles of workers' rights, social progress, and public services.

¶17. (U) In conclusion, Martin declared that when the EU makes good on its promises to safeguard Irish interests, "it makes perfect sense to consult the people again." "The logical way forward is to put the Treaty to the people once more, in this new context," he said.

'No' Campaigners Criticized

¶18. (U) Martin went on to sharply criticize the leaders of groups who campaigned against Treaty in June 2008 and created a "morass of misinformation and eurosceptic phobias." (Note: The two principal groups opposing the Treaty were the political party Sinn Fein and the Libertas movement led by Declan Ganley. End note.) Attempting to preempt the arguments of these groups, Martin said, "As should be abundantly clear from their track records, such groups have an entirely negative vision of Ireland's position in Europe. They see threats where there is opportunity. They see interference where what's really happening is constructive cooperation. They see an erosion of identity in a Union that in actual fact cherishes diversity."

¶19. (U) He declared that there would be very serious consequences if the Irish once again rejected the Lisbon Treaty after having secured EU guarantees on the issues of most concern to them. He commented, "We have to recognize that our partners in Europe would not know what more they could have done to meet our concerns. They might well come to the conclusion that there was nothing they could do. This would introduce a fundamental shadow of doubt over our commitment to the Union. That is not what I want. That is not what I believe the Irish people want."

Comment

¶10. (SBU) In his address, Martin has essentially drawn battlelines

for the second Lisbon Treaty referendum, expected towards the end of 2009. His position, in brief, is that the Irish did not reject Europe in June 2008, but rather rejected unacceptable elements of the Lisbon Treaty that have now been rectified. There is therefore no longer any sensible reason to reject the Treaty, which is essential to ensure that the EU functions well and that Ireland retains its privileged place at the EU table (thereby safeguarding Irish economic, political, and social interests in Europe). Those who continue to reject the Treaty are "Eurosceptics," who do not wish to see Ireland benefit from EU engagement. If Martin leads a successful campaign for the Treaty in coming months, he could become the leading contender to succeed Brian Cowen as the next Prime Minister of Ireland. End comment.

Foley